

Critique

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***Kantara*: The Representation of ‘Daivam Manushya Rupena!’**



Abstract:

Kantara (2002) is an Indian Kannada-language action thriller film written and directed by Rishab Shetty. The meaning of the film title *Kantara* in Kannada is ‘forest’, ‘a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth’ or a ‘mystical forest’. *Kantara* is a deeply rooted mystical drama which embedded with the themes such as Feudalism, Environmentalism, Tribalism, Spiritualism, Mysticism, Superstitions and Bureaucracy and so on. *Kantara* does have all the horrifying elements and fun elements, so that it is considered a ‘Horror comedy’ than an ‘Action drama’. The concept of ‘Avatara’ denotes ‘either the physical appearance or incarnation of a powerful deity or goddess or spirit on the Earth’ in order to re-establish the righteousness on the Earth. Similarly, in *Kantara*, god represents in human form. Hence, *Kantara* represents ‘Daivam Manushya Rupena!’

Keywords: Action drama, Avatara, horror comedy, mystical forest and, righteousness.

Introduction:

Kantara is an Indian Kannada-language action thriller film written and directed by Rishab Shetty, and produced by Vijay Kiragandur through Hombale Films. The meaning of the film title *Kantara* in Kannada is ‘forest’ or ‘a large area covered chiefly with trees and undergrowth’. However, another meaning is also given viz. ‘mystical forest’. The film was narrated in three time settings viz. in 1847, 1970 and 1990, and the story takes place in a fictional village in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka state. The indigenous culture, tradition and beliefs are integral assets of the film.

Research Questions:

This study aims to explore constructive answers (findings) from the research questions mentioned below.

A film, irrespective of genre, must have a subject (smaller/bigger) to discuss or expose or narrate on silver screen as only screenplay and technological elements cannot make the film fruitful without content. Therefore,

What are the subject and objectives of *Kantara*?

Film making is an art cum business. Even though film has been made up of concrete artistic and commercial elements, unfortunately, sometimes it may not be succeeded in front of box-office because of several hypothetical reasons. Then,

Why did *Kantara* reach its wider audience and succeed in front of box-office?

Does *Kantara* have any universal concept in it?

***Kantara*: An Indigenous Content with Universal Applause:**

In fact, here is an opinion about how Indian cinema has been losing touch with its roots and not finding original stories from this heartland which is very diverse and vast, a treasure trove of stories. However, *Kantara*, an original tale rooted in the land and its culture, is deeply rooted mystical drama which embedded with the distinctive themes such as Feudalism, Environmentalism, Tribalism, Spiritualism, Mysticism, Superstitions and Bureaucracy and so on. Moreover, Rishab Shetty, the auteur and protagonist of the film, also strongly believed in his theory that cinema will be more universal, if its content is regional and trust is reposed in regionalism. Therefore, he could succeed in meticulously bringing a tale of myth and legend of the coastal region of Karnataka and its folklore viz. Yakshagana, Bhoota kola, Kambala, Divine worship and Paddana (folk songs collectively giving an account of the demon-gods and the heroes of the Tulu region of Karnataka in verse or poetic prose form). Resulted in, as he believed in earlier, *Kantara* has received universal applause and an Rs 160 million budget film grossed Rs 4000 million and above till date.

Aesthetic Elements of *Kantara*:

Kantara, despite of an action thriller, incorporates concrete aesthetic elements. The first, presentation of the indigenous cultural sport viz. Kambala, an annual buffalo race, and the arguments and frictions part of the sport; the second, Yakshagana; the third, Panjurli, Guliga Daiva and Bhoota Kola; the fourth, Folklore; the fifth, Greenery of the forests; the sixth, Untainted indigenous people and their relationships; the seventh, the Navarasa such as Shringara, romance between hero Shiva and heroine Leela; Hasya, contextual comedy by Shiva and his friends; Karuna, when Guruva is brutally murdered; Raudra, contextual anger of Shiva against the evil; Veera, Shiva's ferocious fight at kambala court, an adventurous attempt to chase the divine wild boar in the forest, and finally heroic combat against the henchmen of Devendra Suttooru; Bhayanaka, dreams of Shiva and the climax; Bibhatsa, merciless killing of the indigenous by Devendra and his henchmen and Killing of Devendra and his henchmen by divine Shiva; Adbutha, divine Shiva's ferocious and heroic fight against the evil at the end; Shantha, the divine Bhoota Kola Shiva makes the all unity including D.R.F.O. Muralidhar at the end to have peace, harmony and unity amongst the indigenous and reaching to the god along with his divine father.

***Kantara*: A 'Horror comedy' than an 'Action drama':**

Kantara, being a low budget film embedded with indigenous content, has been received by the audience irrespective of age, language, and region. So that, possibly a question might be raised that why do people watch, and enjoy watching *kantara*?! So, the answer is quite simple and empirical that *kantara* is a horror film. Moreover, research on 'behavioural, cognitive, and emotional responses' says that majority of the people tend to watch horror films. Generally, horror film are to frighten, shock, horrify, and disgust using a variety of visual and auditory leitmotifs and devices including reference to the supernatural, the abnormal, to mutilation, blood, gore, the infliction of pain, death, deformity, putrefaction, darkness, invasion, mutation, extreme instability, and the unknown (Cherry, 2009; Newman, 2011). In fact, *Kantara* does have all these

horrifying elements in it. Perhaps, it might be the reason why it has been reached to its wider audience. In addition, the hilarious dialogues, contextual comedy by Kaadubettu Shiva and his friends are an add-on flavour and asset to the film's success.

***Kantara*: The Representation of 'Daivam Manushya Rupena!'**

In 1847, the King was in search of peace, despite of having all luxuries, finds a small rock namely Guliga Daiva in a forest that is worshipped by the local tribes where he could experience peace. The king wants get it to his home to attain peace, in turn by giving huge lands to the indigenous. The king agrees with the words of Guliga Daiva through his spirit channelized by the local ritual specialist who performs Bhoota Kola saying that the family of the Guliga Daiva would follow the deity forever.

Later, the inheritors of the king want to get back the lands (place). They forget the legacy of the king, and happen to take legal actions against his will that connotes the human greediness after the wealth by ignoring the agreement between the Guliga Daiva and the King. In fact, Greed is one of the Arishadvargas i.e. the six enemies (Lust/Desire, Anger, Greed, Delusion/Infatuation, Arrogance/Pride and Miserliness/Stinginess) of one's mind which are the fundamental tenets of Kaliyuga. Therefore, it is the act of Kali (Demon) against the Divine in Kaliyuga.

The concept of Avatara, has been given more significance in Hindu mythology, denotes 'descent' that means 'either the physical appearance or incarnation of a powerful deity or goddess or spirit on the Earth'. According to the Hindu mythology, the Dashavatara are the ten primary Avatars of Lord Mahavishnu, one of the supreme trinity (Trimurti) of the universe who are the responsible for the cosmic functions of 'creation, preservation and destruction'. The ten primary Avatars which are including 'Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Turtle), Varaha (Boar), Narasimha (Man-lion), Vamana (Dwarf-god), Parasurama (Brahman Warrior), Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki (Belief to be the tenth avatar who ends the Kali Yuga)' and so on. In fact, every Avatara has its own purpose periodically to protect or restore the righteousness on the Earth. In addition, the same mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita, the Holy book of Hindus.

*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati bhārata
Abhythanamadharmaṣya tadatmanam srijamyaḥam
(Bhagavad Gita Chapter 4, Verse 7)*

*Paritrānaya sadhūnaṅ vināshay cha duṣkṛitāṁ
Dharmasāṅgsthapanarthāy sambhābāmi yuge yuge
(Bhagavad Gita Chapter 4, Verse 8)*

According to the above verses from Bhagavad Gita, the God (the supreme) would manifest himself from age to age in order to defend the pious, destroy the wicked and strengthen the dharma when the righteousness (dharma) declines or unrighteousness is rampant. In fact, the same happens at the end of *Kantara* when Devendra brutally kills the innocent indigenous people and declares himself that the village and the land belongs to him which is the violation of the agreement between his forefather (the king) and the Guliga Daiva. Moreover, his deeds could lead to 'Adharma, Unrest, Violence, Restlessness and Loss of lives'.

"On this holy land, did you forget the guide? Kshetrāpala? My lord Parjūrli might have forgiven, but I will not. The results of your deeds, by offering your blood to this soil I shall safeguard its righteousness" (Divine Shiva speaks to Devendra at the end)

Therefore, as said in Hindu mythology and Bhagavad Gita, the incarnation of a powerful deity or goddess or spirit takes place on the Earth in the physical form in order to defend the pious, destroy the wicked and strengthen the righteousness (dharma). Similarly, the divine spirited Shiva (physical form of the Guliga

Daiva) kills the evil (Devendra) and restores the righteousness, peace, harmony amongst the indigenous people.

Conclusion:

There is an idiom in English ‘A picture is worth a thousand words’ as it consists of its colours, forms, textures and content, and they all have their own contextual meanings which are understood, perceived, decoded, interpreted and criticized by human beings. However, a film is a pool of pictures by constituting enormous colours, forms, textures and content. Therefore, how a film, being a mass media, can be perceived or received by audiences will be a million dollar question since it varies from person to person, film to film and context to context since the question of the efficiency of films remain open in psychology and there is no certainty in how much emotion, cognition and behaviour are changed in people under the influence of mass media. On the other hand, despite of several theories on this concept, the cultivation theory considered that mass communication contributes to the assimilation of commonly accepted values, norms and forms of behaviour while a meta-analysis of studies conveyed that there is a relationship between the broadcast mass media image of reality and people’s attitudes towards it. Therefore, the film, *kantara* has certainly influenced the people from all parts of India and abroad as it consists of the several indigenous, cultural and realistic elements in it.

In fact, after watching *Kantara*, a few questions might be raised. The first, Varaha Avatara (the third incarnation of Vishnu) has been highlighted, but why the name of the hero is merely Shiva, and neither Rama nor Krishna?! Perhaps, the director might have thought of Lord Shiva-the destructor, Shiva-thandava, and his anger. That is why hero name is Shiva and his character has been portrayed as angry young man and destructor. The second, does *Kantara* represent ‘good vs. bad’ or something beyond this? Actually, *Kantara* represents ‘good vs. bad’ besides ‘nature vs. human’. The third, who is Panjurli and Guliga Daiva?. Panjurli is the wild boar representation of Varaha Avatara, and Guliga Daiva is the representation of Kshetrapala, the deity of the nature and who protects the nature. The fourth, what does ‘O’ sound mean? It might be ‘cosmic sound’ derived from ‘Om’. Finally, the fifth, Is there hidden story in *Kantara*? Yes! Hero Shiva is the son of the forest (nature) as his father gets associated with the forest mysteriously. Panjurli is the head of the forest while Guliga Daiva is the protector of the forest. Panjurli- the Wild Boar, being the deity of Shiva’s family, is often visible in his dreams which connotes that it reminds the duty of him to protect the nature but not destruct it. When Shiva’s duty is to kill the evil and protect the nature is over, he disappears from his physical (Manushya) form to metaphysical form (God). Therefore, *Kantara* is the representation of ‘**Daivam Manushya Rupena!**’

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